

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11

SAB-02 /070 W

-----058694 210834Z /11

R 191646Z MAY 78

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7097

INFO PANCANAL

USSOUTHCOM

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PN

SUBJECT: CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS PROPOSED

REF: (A) PANAMA 2175, (B) PANAMA 2851, (C) PANAMA 3022

1. UNSPECIFIED "CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS" WILL BE DISCUSSED BY THE CURRENT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES (NACR) PRIOR TO THE END OF ITS TERM NEXT OCTOBER 11, VICE PRESIDENT GERARDO GONZALEZ ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY. ELABORATING ONLY SLIGHTLY ON GENERAL TORRIJOS' MUSINGS OF LAST MONTH (REPORTED REF A), WHEN HE SAID THE REVOLUTION MIGHT NOW REQUIRE "REALIGNMENT" OF THE GOVERNMENT'S STRUCTURE TO ENHANCE THE COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES' ROLE, GONZALEZ STATED THAT "GREATER LEGISLATIVE FUNCTIONS" WILL BE ACCORDED TO THE REPRESENTATIVES.

2. AS REPORTED IN "LA REPUBLICA" OF MAY 17, GONZALEZ EXPLAINED THAT, IN ORDER TO AVOID ANY "SURPRISE SCHEMES", THE REFORMS WILL FIRST BE DISCUSSED BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON LEGISLATION, THEN BY THE CURRENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NACR, AND THEN BY THE NEW NACR TO BE ELECTED AUGUST 6 AND INSTALLED IN OFFICE OCTOBER 11. THIS IS, IN FACT, THE SCENARIO CALLED FOR IN THE PANAMANIAN CONSTITUTION (ARTICLE 140, WHEREBY CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS ARE PROPOSED BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON LEGISLATION, APPROVED (WITH OR WITHOUT MODIFICATIONS) OR DISAPPROVED BY THE NACR AND, IF APPROVED, SUBMITTED FOR RATIFICATION

TO THE SUBSEQUENT NACR.

3. COMMENT: IN VERY GENERAL TERMS, THIS IS THE KIND OF ACTION THE POLITICAL PARTIES, THE RETURNED EXILES, AND OTHER MALCONTENTS HAVE BEEN DEMANDING OF THE GOVERNMENT: A MOVE TOWARDS A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES WITH REAL LEGISLATIVE POWER. THEY WANT MORE, OF COURSE, SUCH AS SEPARATION OF POWERS AND DIRECT ELECTION OF PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT. CURRENTLY, IT IS THE NACR THAT ELECTS A PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT. IF THE NACR RETAINS THAT POWER AND, IN ADDITION, GAINS GREATER LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY, THE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE COULD BE "REALIGNED" IN THE NACR'S FAVOR, POTENTIALLY PUTTING IT IN DIRECT CONFLICT WITH GENERAL TORRIJOS AND HIS APPOINTEES. SUCH A CONFRONTATION OBVIOUSLY IS NOT WHAT THE CURRENT REGIME REALLY WANTS. BASIC TO ALL OF THIS, HOWEVER, IS THE IMPORTANT QUESTION OF WHAT GENERAL TORRIJOS' OWN PLANS MIGHT BE FOR THE FUTURE, WHEN HIS CURRENT TERM AS "MAXIMUM LEADER OF THE REVOLUTION" EXPIRES IN OCTOBER. AND THAT QUESTION REMAINS UNANSWERED. JORDEN

NOTE BY OC/T: MESSAGE DELAYED IN TRANSMISSION.

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